(d) and (e) On May 27, 1998, the Government reiterated its readiness to discuss a "no first use" agreement with Pakistan as also with other countries bilaterally, or in a collective forum. In 1994, India had proposed to Pakistan that both countries jointly undertake not to be the first to use their nuclear capability against each other. This has been reiterated in a number of formal statements issued by India.

Damaged Items of CSD

3062. SHRI S. NIRAIKULATHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the percentage of damage due to handling, etc. allowed on items provided to Canteen Stores Department;

(b) the percentage of damage shown by C.S.D., Air Force Station, New Delhi, during the last three years;

(c) whether there is any counter check by any independent authority to verify the claim of damage; and

(d) if not, will Government appoint an independent authority to go into such claim of damages physically to prevent false claim and to save loss to the exchequer?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) While regularisation of actual losses, incurred in handling of CSD stores is provided for, no permissible percentage, in this behalf, has been specified by the Department. However, in the case of Air Force Canteen, New Delhi, which is a Unit Run Canteen, the permissible percentage of damage, on account of handling etc. is provided @ 1% of the indent value. The percentage of loss, in the Air Force Station Canteen, New Delhi, during the last three years, is as follows:—

1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
0.033%	0.040%	0.042%

(c) and (d) There is, no question of any loss to the state Exchequer, emanating from the Air Force Canteen, New Delhi, which is a Non-Public Fund Canteen, under the Air Force Station, New Delhi. The same, however, is subject to annual audit as well as regular checking by the specialists' inspecting teams. Therefore, there is no question of loss resulting from any false claim.

Posts of Officers Lying vacant in Armed Forces

3063. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of posts of officers lying vacant in the armed forces; and

(b) the effective measures/steps taken to meet the shortage of army officers?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) The present vacancy position of officers in respect of three services is given below:—

Army	—	13323
Navy	—	1069
Air Force	—	695

2. Various measures have been initiated to make the shortage in the officer cadre in the Army, such as, University Entry Scheme, exemption from appearing in Combined Defence Service Examination for NCC 'C' certificate holders for induction as Short Service Commission Officer (SSCO), induction of women as officers, promotion of service JCOs/ORs into the newly created Special Commissioned Officer (SCO) cadre. An Image Projection Campaign was launched during 1997-98 with the assistance of professional advertising agency. Second phase of the Campaign has been approved.

3. Implementation of the Fifth Pay Commission's recommendations in respect of defence services has resulted in improved pay scales, allowances and concenssions to armed forces personnel. It is expected that the comulative effect